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BIRD POPULATION GROWS  
WHEN NESTS ARE SUPPLIED

For economic as well as for esthetic reasons an effort should be made to attract and protect birds and to increase their numbers, says the United States Department of Agriculture. Birds feed upon practically all insect pests. They are voracious, able to move freely from place to place, and exert a steady influence in keeping down the swelling tide of insect life.

It is not only possible to attract numerous species of birds by supplying boxes and other nesting facilities, says the department, but it has been amply proved that the total bird population on a given area can be raised far above normal by these and other methods of attraction. The larger the number of birds, of course, the greater the drain upon their food supply. If this food supply consists chiefly of injurious insects, man profits; if of the products of his cultivation, he suffers. All things considered, however, it is better to have more birds, for the injurious individuals or kinds can be controlled or suppressed while the useful species, if not present in time of need, can not be hastily summoned. Experience has shown that those who have increased the number of birds on their property have had cause for satisfaction rather than regret.

The average number of birds over the eastern United States is a little more than one pair to the acre, but it seems fairly easy to increase this number in suburban, residential, and park areas to about 10 pairs to the acre. This has been accomplished at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, for instance, with 404 pairs to 40 acres; at Olney, Ill., 70 pairs to 8 acres; and at Chevy Chase, Md., 224 pairs to 23 acres. Even higher records have been made, as 135 pairs to 5 acres at Wild Acres, Md., near Washington, D.C., and the number may run up to a much higher figure on a single acre where a thriving colony of purple martins is domiciled.

A frequently cited familiar European example of the value of attracting birds is worth repeating, says the Biological Survey of the department. On the estate of Baron von Berlepsch, in Germany, bird attraction methods of every kind were practiced, and among other things more than 2,000 nests were supplied, of which 90 per cent were occupied. During an outbreak of the oak leaf-roller other woods in the region were entirely defoliated, but that on the Berlepsch estate stood out as a green oasis. With this example before them, municipal and provincial governments in Germany took up the providing of nest boxes for birds, and more than 9,000 were erected in the Grand Duchy of Hesse alone.